HARAMBEE FLAME

VOL. 9 NO. 9 SEPT. 1988

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TRIBUTE

One would think, based upon just casual observation that this man is simply just another liberal "negro." But, in fact, his demeanor is deceptive. This man, this African person, may very well be one of the most dedicated persons to the African community in Omaha, and elsewhere, who has ever walked among us. And he has a partner in this dedication and commitment--his wife, a Sister who must be among our most patient and generous in order to have remained with a man whose hours were so long spent away from home, whose work so often went home with him.

In addition to their committed and dedicated involvement in community affairs, this Brother and Sister are down-to-earth, friendly folks. They will surely be missed. The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization pays tribute to Buddy and Wilma Hogan and wishes for them and their children the best of health and peace of spirit. We thank them for all the time and effort they gave to us when we called upon them.

The African community in Omaha will miss Buddy and Wilma, as we will. But the loss to us will be the gain of our Brothers and Sisters in Los Angeles. Hopefully, African folks there will appreciate the Hogans more than African folks in Omaha did.

This space right here...Well, we wanted to have a photo of the Hogans in it. But we aint got none. And our covert operation we set into motion to cop us one didn't work worth a damn.

"ART" FOR MONEY'S SAKE -Mondo

In the August 31st edition of THE GUARDIAN(N.Y.), there is an article entitled "Consciousless Confections" in which the writer, Barba a Day, takes Eddie Murphy's film, "Coming To America," to task for being, among other things, "mindless" and "an insult to African womanhood." The film has also been attacked by Armond White, film critic for the New York paper, the CITY SUN. Murphy responded to White's assertion that his film is "ahistorical" and "anti-cultural" by stating, in part, that "Coming To America" provided jobs for a lot of "black" performers.

It wasn't too long ago that the film, "The Color Purple," based on the book of the same title by Alice Walker, was pounced upon by many African folks(primarily men) as portraying African men in America in a negative light. And while some folks did differentiate the film from the book, the book was often criticized on the same basis. However, it can be legitimately argued that the book simply revealed an ugly side of the reality of relations between African men and African women in this country--that many African men, being products of a racist and sexist society, do disrespect and abuse African women. In a sense, it can be said that much of the bombast levelled against the book amounted to a figurative killing of the messenger. But beyond this, there was an aspect of Walker's book that could and should have been criticized; and legitimately so. Through her character, "Nettie," Alice Walker exhibits an attitude toward native Africans that is condescending and not unlike that of Caucasian missionaries and others who operate under the belief that it took Europeans to bring civilization to Africa.

The fact is, however, that I have seen neither "Coming To America" nor the film verstion of "The Color Purple." Nonetheless, the controversies that these films, and others, have raised with respect to the

question of how African(American-born or otherwise) are portrayed do point us to an undeniable fact--that far too many African performers/entertainers in this country do have a profound ignorance and utter lack of understanding of our history(in Africa and elsewhere) and, moreover, an attitude so steeped in homage to the attainment of economic wealth that they don't appear to even feel uncomfortable about perpetuating racist myths and stereotypes, promoting the idea of Caucasian supremacy, etc. in the role sthey play and/or performances they give. Obviously, there are performers who do not fit into this mold--Cicely Tyson, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, and Bernie Casey possibly. And we have to believe that there are others.

Eddie Murphy is a brilliant comic. And it is good that he has joined the tiny ranks of those other African folks in the U.S. who are making commercial films and giving African actors, camera operators, and so forth work. And, yes, comedy, by its very nature, is supposed to make us laugh. And we should not be so nervously self-conscious that we cannot, as African people, laugh at ourselves. But it is one thing for a people who have a strong and positive sense of themselves, their history and culture to laugh at themselves. It is quite another thing for a people who have little sense of self and practically no knowledge of their history and traditions to laugh at themselves. We African folks of U.S. birth are this latter people. And too often it is the case that, when films, t.v. programs, etc. portray us as laughable, that portrayal is one of ridicule, a portrayal in which the term "butt of jokes" takes on real applicability.

For example, if, in the context of a comedy routine or film, the thickness of our lips or nappiness of our hair is joked about, this joking does take place in a larger context, the societal context. We live in a racist society in which our physical African characteristics are under constant assault as being undesirable, as being ugly. We live in a society in which mass media have established a

standard of physical beauty based on Caucasian features. And while a certain level of self-effacement can be healthy, we've had quite enough of it. What we need is a healthy dose of cultural self-exaltation. If there is something that needs to be satirized or otherwise poked fun at, it is our proclivity toward both denying our Africanness and trying to Caucasianize, or whitenize, ourselves. In fact, it is this very proclivity which is a major target of Spike Lee's "School Daze" and "Hollywood Shuffle" by Robert Townsend.

But beyond simply the issue of humor, there is the more general matter of how we are portrayed and addressed in the television and film industries as a whole and the roles that African writers, directors, producers, and actors play in the process of our being portrayed and addressed. We should know America well enough to expect that Caucasians in the television and film industries will, sometimes blatantly and sometimes subtly, portray and address us in such a fashion that we are demeaned. And there are methods we can employ to deal with that. But we have a <u>right</u> to expect and demand better treatment from our own--from Africans in these industries.

We should not begrudge Eddie Murphy, Bill Cosby, Whoopi Goldberg, Quincy Jones, or any other African men and women in the film and television fields for making big bucks. But the proposition that it is okay for African writers, directors, producers, actors, etc. to put out just any kind of entertainment product--no matter how demeaning it is to --because it is financially profitable for them is a proposition we cannot accept. To do so would be comparable to accepting the proposition that it is allright for African folks to sell drugs in our communities because it is financially profitable for them, or that it is tolerable for our elderly to be robbed by other African persons since such activity is a lucrative enterprise for the robbers.

(Continued on page 12)

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter, meaning that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
Attn: Mondo
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Note on poetry submissions: We are looking for poems that make effective use of imagery, that have beauty and power, and that do not sacrifice such for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme.

From Other Sources

News Of Non-Establishment Political Activity

Suppressed

..."What the army of journalists who descended on Atlanta for the (Dem.)convention didn't report was that in the churches, the hotel rooms and the streets the wheels of the Black-led, multi-racial independent movement were turning. On the Sunday before the start of the conventions 3,000 African-Americans packed the city's historic Wheat Street Baptist Church to hear Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan proclaim that if Dukakis, Bush or anybocy else want the Black vote in '88, then they'd have to agree to support the 'Black Agenda'--a program of education, health care, employment opportunities and community development. To the cheers of the crowd, independent Presidential candidate Lenora Fulani endorsed the Black Agenda from the podium. Farrakhan, the outspoken leader of the Nation of Islam, pointed out that the African-American community had an alternative to the Republicans and Democrats in the Fulani campaign and the third party movement...

"...But despite the fact that the church bristled with TV cameras and reporters, not a word of Farrakhan's nod to the independent Fulani candidacy was allowed to get through to the outside world...

-from "Atlanta's Untold Story," which appears on pages 3, 16, and 19 of the August 11 edition of THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE.

Roots of "Underclass" Examined

..."At a structural level alone, the extraordinarily high and sustained unemployment level among black youth is a function of such converging factors as the movement of capital to foreign soil,

from the cities to the suburbs, and from the northern cities to select areas of the Sunbelt. Other factors are (1) the changing character of work reflected in the decline of manufacturing and the increase in advanced service-sector occupations in major cities where a great bulk of the black population resides and (2) changing immigration patterns of the last decade that have produces a certain kind of competitive youth employment.

"We have noted that the current unemployment figures for black youth is nearly 50 percent, four times that for the unemployment for those in this age group just two decades ago. While the nation used cheap young black labor for centuries, the new generation faces for the first time both the rejection and the massive irrelevance of their labor.

"One of the major factors is the decision by a substantial segment of the U.S. business community to relocate in areas where black youth cannot be employed...

"The export of capital to cheap foreign labor markets is a current fact of life in America. Since 1970, there have been thousands of plant closings in the country, many of them in the Northeast and Midwest in and around our major cities where the bulk of black youth reside...

"For the largest manufacturing plants(those with more than 100 employees), plant closures affected the Northeast disproprtionately...

"...Houston, Dallas, and Oklahoma City do have many new plants, new jobs and new immigrants. However, as Bluetone and Harrison note, plant closures hit other regions of the South, and it is this old South where many black youth were especially affected by declining occupational opportunities.

"Plant closings and relocations...also affect black youth when there are local shifts from urban to

suburban areas...

"In the brief 25-year period from 1953-1978, more than 15,000 shopping centers were built in suburban America, producing more than half the nation's retail sales by the late 1970s. This is one part of the intricate puzzle of declining markets and economic activities in the central cities that would affect employment opportunities for those residing there..."

-from "Social Implications Of The 'New' Black Urban Underclass," which appears on pages 2-8 of the May/June edition of THE BLACK SCHOLAR.

Institute of "Jazz" To Be Established

..."Monk(Thelonius, Jr.), son of the great artist and chairman of the Thelonius Monk Foundation, recently announced that the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz will open in downtown Durham in 1991. The institute will be a fully accredited, degree-granting, post-secondary educational institution affiliated with Duke University. Up to 200 students will be recruited through a worldwide search..

..."In addition to its resident faculty, the institute will invite some of the world's outstanding jazz musicians to be visiting professors and guest artists. The advisory board includes musicians Art Blakey, Branford and Wynton Marselis, Steve Allen, Herb Alpert and Dizzy Gillespie.

"Other members of the board include basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and performers Debbie Allen and Bill Cosby."

-from "Monk's Music Institute," which appears on page 21 of the August 17 edition of THE GUARDIAN. We put "jazz" in quotes because the term has become practically meaningless insofar as its function as defining a particular type of music is concerned. Much of what is

referred to as "jazz" is nothing more than instrumental pop music. "African-American Classical Music" is a more fitting term in that it gives credit to the music's originators and primary movers and reflects the complexity and seriousness of this great music tradition.

Preserving The Culture In Dance And Music

..."Art of Black Dance And Music(ABDM) was founded more than a decade ago(in Somerville, Massachusetts by its director, De Ama Battle). The company developed an artistic goal that directed them to preserve African heritage through dance, art, music and folklore, while promoting positive public awareness about the roots of African-American cultural expressions. Over the years, ABDM has emerged as one of the most visible African-American dance companies in New England, accomplishing its mission to teach the common history of mankind through dance and music and education and entertaining through the richly diverse expressions of Black Culture..."

-from "Legacy In African Dance And Culture," which appears on page 4A of the August 18 edition of THE COLUMBUS CALL AND POST.

Legitimacy Of ANC Freedom Charter Disputed

"In its vigorous campaign for hegemony in the struggle against the racist minority regime in South Africa, the African National Congress(ANC)...has had its blue-print document for change in that country, the Freedom Charter, rebuffed and rejected increasingly by a number of black mass organizations, including the workers, inside Azania...

"...in a recent annual general meeting of its Johannesburg chapter, CCAWUSA(Commercial and Catering Allied Worders' Union) assembled more than 8,000 delegates from its 80,000 paid-up members in Soweto

to discuss whether the Charter was an acceptable document for liberation. The motion was split between those who supported it and those who supported socialism...No more than 500 voted for... the Freedom Charter...

"It is to be recalled that the famous Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 by ANC and its multiracial Congress Alliance, was the cause of the split in the ANC in the late fifties when the Africanists decided to launch PAC(Pan-Africanist Congress)...

"The main bone of contention has been the Freedom Charter's preamble: 'We the people of South Africa declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white..'

"The Africanists, on the other hand, naintained that the country belonged to the indigenous African people, and that the main content of the struggle was aimed at liberating it from its foreign occupiers who now form the settler colonialist regime...

"For all these decades this argument still remains at the core of the split in Azania's national liberation movement..."

-from "Azania Workers Reject The Freedom Charter, In Favor Of Unity And Socialism," which appears on pages 21 and 35 of the June/July/ August edition of BURNING SPEAR.

Railways To Benefit Frontline States

"In a daring step with potentially far-reaching regional ramifications, a long-idle rail line connecting land-locked Zimbabwe to the Mozambican capital and port city of Maputo has been reopened.

"Influential Aimbabwean business figure Eddie Cross told a seminar here marking eight years of Southern African Development Coordination Conference(SADCC)

that the first locomotives have already travele the entire 320-mile length of the line, known as the Limpopo corridor. Regular commercial traffi is slated to begin in September.

"The line was closed in February 1984 after repe ted raids by South African commandos and sabotag by the Pretoria-backed Mozambique National Resis tance(MNR or Renamo)...

"Along with the Beira corridor and the Tzara lin from Zambia to Tanzania, the three routes could carry virtually all of the frontline states' $10 billion in annual overseas trade. Only 5% would continue to go thoough South African ports..."

-from "Limpopo Rail Reopens, Cuts Dependence South African Ports," which appears on page of the August 3 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

Undercurrents In Haiti

"...rumors of a coup and army in-fighting are ram pant lately in Port-au-Prince. The most commonl heard scenario has hard-line Defense Minister Wi liams Regala being sent into ambassadorial limbo in Ecuador or Spain, while the infamous Co. Jean Claude Paul--who has been indicted in Miami on drug-trafficking charges--would be turned over t U.S. authorities in return for the resumption of U.S. aid, cut off after last November's bloodily aborted elections..."

-from "Army Steps Up Bloodshed On Pretext Of 'Disorder,'" which appears on page 19 of the August 31 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

Whether the previously mentioned criticisms of "Coming To America" are justified and valid or not, the fact that they have been made, along with what we know about film and television fare generally, points to the necessity of our developing a process and institutions ehereby we may join with African men and women in the film and television as well as other entertainment media and vehicles to devise standards relating to the portrayal of African people(in America, Africa, and elsewhere) and the contexts in which these portrayals occur. In addition to the standard-development function, these processes and institutions should fill the role of educating African writers, actors, etc. in matters of our history, traditions, etc. and encouraging self-education on their parts; of establishing systems of support and encouragement for those who serve us in a positive fashion; and of setting up systems whereby disapproval of disservice can be effectively expressed.

Returning to the matter of Armond White's criticism of "Coming To America," one argument Eddie Murphy used in his defense was that the box-office success of the film indicated that he must have an understanding of the tastes, morals, and values of the "black" community. The fact is that our tastes, morals, and values have been sha ped by the racist, sexist, and materialist institutions of an American society in which we are not respected and in which far too many of us have come not to respect ourselves and each other. If White's characterization of "Coming To America" as "ahistorical" and "anti-cultural" is accurate and Murphy does understand our tastes , morals, and values; then his defense can be translated: "Them negroes got no dignity, no sense of history. They'll go for anything."

"But more than likely, while Eddie Murphy may know what our tastes, morals, and values are; he probably does not understand that these are the tastes, morals and values of individual and collective self-contempt, rooted in cultural and historical ignorance. Again, if White's assessments of Murphy's

film are accurate, then it can be said of Eddie Murphy, as it can be said of so many of our entertainers, that he does not understand that our tastes, morals, and values are reflective of cultural and historical ignorance because he does not know of and/or understand this ignorance in himself.

Caucasian America has done an excellent(from its perspective) job of severing us, mentally and psychologically, from Africa. It has done a very effective job of convincing us that Africa is a land of intellectual and moral darkness. So it is understandable, then, that Eddie Murphy would, in an effort to present and portray an African from Africa, give us a picture distorted by the racist images and stereotypes taught to him, just as they have been taught to us. If he has done a film that is demeaning to us, that is "ahistorical" and "anti-cultural" and we are flocking to it in droves, then this is as much an indictment of us as it is of him. But most of us do not have the money and other resources to make, promote, and distribute films. So, at the present time, we are dependent upon Brothers and Sisters in positions like Eddie's to do films for us, films for our enlightenment. And we cannot afford the "luxury" of films, t.v. programs, etc. - written, produced, directed, and/or acted out by Africans - that are nothing more than "art" for money's sake.

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To subscribe to the FLAME, send your money order or check, payable to the "Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization," to: HARAMBEE FLAME; Harambee Arfikan Cultural Organization; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500. A year's subscription is $6.00 - a worthy investment.

Back In Time

Men (and women)* of almost every shade of color can be found in modern India; but the early inhabitants of India were black. Their descendants survive in Central India today. They have Negroid features, dark skin, and woolly hair. The ancient Indians are described by Professor Lynn Thorndike as "short, black men with almost Negro noses"... The first great civilization of India was established in the Indus Valley. They built large cities; the principal ones being Mohenjo Daro, Chanhu Daro, and Harappa. Their cities were well built: Mohenjo Daro was two square miles in area, with regularly laid out main and side streets, lined with attractive two-story brick houses. Bathrooms were common, and they were fitted out with runaway drains leading to brick sewers which were laid under the streets. This culture reached its peak about 3000 B.C. These people had domesticated cattle, sheep, and elephants; they cultivated wheat and cotton, possessed boats and wheeled carts, and were skillful workers in bronze and iron. They even discovered a process for making iron rust-proof. There is still standing in India a pillar of stainless steel, and after three thousand years there is no sign of rust on its surface.

Source: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS
by John G. Jackson

*Added by the editor

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Announcements

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization will be holding its annual symposium on September 18 from 5-8:30 p.m. at the State Prison in Lincoln(14th & Pioneer Blvd.). The theme for the program is "Recapturing Our Youth." There will be a number of presentations exploring the questions of youth violence, drugs, value systems, etc. In addition, we will be sharing ideas on how the African community, on its own initiative and making use of its own resources, can resolve these youth-related problems. Refreshments will be served following the program. For further information, write to: Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500. Or call 471-3161 (ext. 380 or 379) between the hours of 12:30 and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

There will be a showing of Tony Brown's film, "The White Girl," at the Orpheum Theatre in Omaha on September 20. Tony Brown, the host and producer of "Tony Brown's Journal," describes his film as a love story with an anti-drug theme, will be present at the September 20 showing. The movie is being made available to individuals and groups interested in using it for fund-raising. Inquiries in this regard should be sent to: Tony Brown Productions, Inc.; 1501 Broadway; Suite 2014; New York, New York; 10036. As we understand it, Joyce Harrison is the person to contact about the September 20 showing. She can be contacted at 453-5655.

The seventh session of the International Tribunal on Reparations for African People in the U.S. and the annual African National Reparations Organization(ANRO) convention will be held at the Uhuru House/"Joseph Waller Community Center" in St. Petersburg, Florida on November 12-14. For additional information, you should write the ANRO national office c/o National Coordinator; P.O. Box 67376; Baltimore, MD; 21215 - (301)466-9260.